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SUBJECT: Sudan's URRP Nominates Presidential Candidate

REF: 09 KHARTOUM 1097

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 05, Sudan's Umma Renewal and Reform Party (URRP) announced its intention to nominate its Chairman, Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi, for President in the April 2010 general elections. Mr. al-Fadil al-Mahdi has a long, patchy career in Sudanese politics, and has held a variety of leadership positions both in opposition to, and in cooperation with, the current administration. Given the relative weakness of URRP, even in relation to other Sudanese opposition parties, al-Fadil al-Mahdi's chances of winning the presidency are very slim, but his candidacy gives an interesting first look at opposition strategies as the elections approach. End Summary.

¶2. (U) URRP is one of only two Sudanese opposition parties to have announced their intentions to nominate a presidential candidate for the April 2010 elections. URRP's January 5 announcement came on the heels of a similar announcement from the Popular Congress Party (PCP), which declared the candidacy of a Southern Muslim, Abdallah Deng Nhial, as its choice (reftel). Both of these announcements were made unofficially, as the window for nominations did not officially open until January 12.

Long Political Career

¶3. (U) A trained economist and career politician, Al-Fadil al-Mahdi is the son of a wealthy, prestigious Sudanese family, and the nephew of former Sudanese President al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. During his uncle's administration in the late 1980's, Mubarak Al-Fadil Al-Mahdi held a variety of positions, including a month-long term as Member of Parliament, and several short stints heading a variety of government ministries. Al-Fadi al-Mahdi is the Chairman of the Sudanese Umma Renewal and Reform Party (URRP).

¶4. (SBU) During the Numeiri Dictatorship, and the later military rule of the Islamist government, al-Fadil al-Mahdi played a key role in the political opposition. He supported the founding of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and formed a relationship between the Umma Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) that led to the SPLM joining the Alliance. He lived in the UK after the coup d'etat of Al-Bashir, during which time he engineered the Chukudum agreement between Umma and the SPLM, as well as the Djibouti agreement between the NCP and Umma, which allowed for his April 2000 return to Sudan from de-facto exile.

Split with Umma

¶5. (SBU) Shortly after his return to Sudan, al-Fadil al-Mahdi split from Umma over ideological differences, and founded the URRP. URRP began a short-lived relationship with the NCP, which ended with the Khartoum government's arrest of al-Fadil al-Mahdi for allegedly planning attacks in Khartoum and a coup.

¶6. (SBU) Al-Fadil al-Mahdi is rumored to be in possession of significant cash of the Al-Mahdi family and Umma party. Allegedly, when, by 1989, the family and party faced troubles with the Islamist government, al-Fadil al-Mahdi was asked to flee to the UK with the family/party funds, which allegedly were never returned. URRP's/al Mahdi's relations with the larger Umma party continue, but remain tense.

Candidacy A Long Shot

¶7. (U) In a January 6 meeting, Al-Fadil al-Mahdi acknowledged to Poloff that he is a long-shot candidate at best, given the small number of voters aligned with the URRP. Al-Fadil al-Mahdi has spent little time in public office and lacks the charisma of his famous

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uncle, former President al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. The URRP officially agreed to boycott the elections process as a signatory to the Juba declaration (Reftel). Al-Fadil al-Mahdi has himself called for the elections to be postponed until November 2010, and does not appear to be actively campaigning for the presidency at this time. He has also noted that, if the other opposition parties of the Juba Conference choose to run another, single, candidate, he will drop out of the race.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: As relatively small representatives of the Northern opposition, both the URRP and the PCP must rely heavily on their ties with Southern Muslim voters if they are to stand any chance in the elections. It is not clear at this point whether Southerners will cooperate with these aims, or, as many political analysts have predicted, stay home from the polls, banking on a split from the North after the referendum. PCP leader al-Turabi has called for all opposition parties to nominate a wide field of candidates, to weaken Bashir's voter base and force a runoff. While al-Fadil al-Mahdi will likely win neither the endorsement of the broader Juba Conference, or the presidency, he could play an important role in al-Turabi's shotgun strategy, should the other opposition parties choose to follow suit. End comment.
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